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Boudreau, Paul E

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From: Pfeuffer, Paul
Sent: Friday, April 28, 2006 12:30 PM
To: Wohlers, Paul D (Skopje); Milovanovic, Gillian A (Skopje); Oriansky, Michael D (Skopje)
Subject: FW: Macedonia denies role in CIA abduction

From: Kelley, Henry E
Sent: Friday, April 28, 2006 10:56 AM
To: Pfeuffer, Paul
Cc: English, Charles L; Sainz, Francisco D; Bisharat, Henry; Kaburnoto, Kevin C; Armitage, David T
Subject: Macedonia denies role in CIA abduction

Macedonia denies role in alleged CIA "renditlon"

By Kole Casule

SKOPJE, April 28 (Reuters) - Macedonia said on Friday it expected an EU investigative team to clear it of any involvement in the suspected CIA abduction of a German man on its territory.

But conflicting accounts of Kuwaiti-born Khaled el-Masri's 23-day stay in the country and the manner of his departure persisted.

Masri says he was detained in Macedonia on Dec. 31, 2003, held by Macedonian guards in a Skopje hotel and flown by the CIA to Afghanistan and jailed for months as a terrorism suspect.

He was released in May 2004 and dumped without explanation in Albania.

A six-member European Parliament team arrived in the Balkan country on Thursday to probe the case, part of a wider investigation launched in January into suspected secret prisoner transfers and illegal detentions by the CIA in Europe.

Macedonian Interior Minister Ljubomir Mihailovski said there was nothing to suggest either the Macedonian security agencies or the CIA had any involvement in the case.

"We had a good discussion and we hope that finally it will be made clear that there is no case involving Macedonian security agencies," said Mihailovski, whose country hopes to clinch a date for EU accession talks later this year.

"There are no indications that foreign intelligence agencies, ie the CIA, were involved in this case."

Human rights groups say Masri's case is among the best known examples of U.S. "extraordinary rendition" -- the practice of secretly transferring terrorist suspects to third countries where, the groups say, they may face abuse or torture.

He is now suing former CIA chief George Tenet and other officials for wrongful imprisonment and torture.

Mihailovski said he believed Masri left the country via a border crossing into neighbouring Kosovo, Serbia's United Nations-run southern province. Border police in Kosovo do not stamp the passports of people entering. It was "speculation", he said, that Masri left by plane.

But a member of the EU team told German WDR radio Masri's passport contained a stamp from the Skopje airport dated Jan. 23, the day his lawyer says he was flown to Kabul via Baghdad.

Wolfgang Kreissl-Doerfler, a German MEP, said the most important question facing the investigators was: "What happened when Mr Masri entered Macedonia?"

The team plans to wrap up its trip on Saturday with a visit to the Skopje hotel where Masri says he was held, beaten and interrogated.

(Additional reporting by Mark Trevelyan in Berlin)

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